Some Relations of Religious Education and Secular Education

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SOME RELATIONS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND SECULAR EDUCATION*

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Religious education cannot permanently employ methods which are out of harmony with the methods of secular education. Those methods may differ with the different subjects to which they are applied; but they cannot permanently contradict each other. The one will gradually assimilate the other. And the one that will assimilate the other, in any age, is the one that, in that age, has the wider hold on the convictions of men.

The relation of these two, each to each, varies and must vary from age to age. In the medieval period, it was institutional religion that exercised that wider sway, and secular education, if such it could be called, departed only occasionally or furtively from the ways of religious education. Now it is natural science that rules the minds of men. A thousand evidences to the contrary may be cited, but I believe the broad generalization will still hold true. Science rules the thoughts of men, and modern education is allied with modern science. It is this type of education that is dominant to-day, and we may confidently expect that in this age it will mold religious education to its standards and its processes.

The march of education, having this scientific and secular character, is one of the mightiest spectacles of our modern world. It is the central and unifying fact of modern civilization. The religion of this age is cleft by innumerable differences of faith and polity; that is, for the time being, it is normally and necessarily sectarian. There are seeming exceptions but they will not disprove the rule. The science of this age is the same science all

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over the world. And modern education, overpassing partisan and sectarian bounds, overpassing even local, national, and racial bounds, is fast coming to be the same throughout the world, and to constitute one dominant, world-wide, human interest. *Der Glaube trennt die Völker, die Wissenschaft vereinigt sie.*

We cannot doubt that this age of sectarianism has a part of its own to play in the religious history of the nations. If it is a peculiarly unstable and transitional stage in the life of the Church, it may be no less important to the rounding out of that life into its fulness than any other stage through which the Church has past. But so long as religion is predominantly sectarian, it may not expect to regain its ascendency over the institutions and the methods of education. Universal education gravitates toward universal knowledge and toward universally recognized forms of thought. The partial and unprevailing view of any party or sect is not at home in public schools, even though it be a view which shall eventually lead the world. Religion in its modern relations, sectarian religion, is a breeder of disturbance in those national systems of education in which it now holds a place through favor of a tradition all unconsciously outgrown. Disturbance is often wholesome, but not disturbance of this kind; for it is full of bitterness, and often it appeals to simple prejudice. I doubt not such disturbance will continue, working some little good and any amount of harm, till the tradition which sustained such teaching among those peoples shall be cast aside. Where the tradition has already past away or where it has never become established, the teaching of any system of religious doctrine is to be steadily excluded from public and common schools. Formal instruction in religion will be out of place in public schools wherever and so long as religion is sectarian, wherever and so long as the method of religious teaching is greatly at variance with the methods of secular education.

And will the time ever come when these limitations will no longer prevail? I am not a prophet, but I have no doubt that such a time will come—not in your day and mine, but in the course of generations or of centuries. The topmost crest of the sectarian wave in our religious history would seem already to be past. It is a wave centuries long and it may be ages long, but it is a reced-

ing wave. Men still emphasize their religious differences; but already there is notable gain in the emphasis of religious agreement. It is a change that points toward a day when sectarian distinctions shall be decisively subordinated to religious affirmations as wide as undegenerate mankind. The differences will not disappear, and agreement will not be attained by the mere cancellation of differences. But the differences will, I think, become subordinate and tributary. And, by ways that none but a prophet can foresee, by revivals of religious thought and power such as the world has not yet known, the spirit of man will make its way to new convictions of religious verity, and they will be wider and deeper than the unities of the past.

We cannot doubt it, for we believe that religion as well as science stands for a permanent need of the human soul. As long as our temporal incompleteness brings its manifold strain upon the human heart, so long we shall feel ourselves stricken with need of some eternal perfectness. And the religion which answers to this need will be either the conscious and dominant interest of our lives or the large background of our lives; unless it be in occasional conditions of disease, sporadic or epidemic, where for a time the sense for religion may seem to be altogether lost—yet only for a time.

In education and religion, as in all things else, no age is final and complete, but every age must do its part in preparation for the next, must contribute its part to the whole of human history. But if the conditions of this age are not permanent, they are permanent and imperative for this age. Let us now look a little further into the relations of education and religion in this age, viewing these relations as a stage in the long continued development of such relations—a process that has run through ages that have been and must run through the ages to come—yet as having a certain immediate finality for the times in which we live.

So far as modern education is concerned, we see that it is allied not only with modern science but with democracy. Even in monarchical lands this is true, in subtle ways that are very wide in their reach. In our own land the alliance between education and democracy is open and absolute. Our secular education, as both democratic and scientific, finds its greatest elevation, it makes

its warmest claim to the devotion of men, on the moral plane. Democratic education seeks the good of every man because he is man, and so reaches its high moral conception of social service. Scientific education teaches men to follow truth for the sake of truth, in the full conviction that human interests and clear truth must in the end be one. In its pure devotion to truth, natural science is moral, unswervingly moral. The best that education draws from the scientific alliance is not even the perfected method which science has to teach, but its moral elevation, its power to awaken a new devotion to truth. In truth and social service our public education rises to the summit of its power.

What then is the character of religion, in this age of sectarianism, which may call for special consideration?

Religion is not only a permanent human fact, but certain of its aspects and elements can be distinguished as likewise abiding through historic change. Consider the aspects of doctrine, of ritual, of institutional organization, and of ethical spirit, not to mention others at this time. The student of ecclesiastical history knows how indissolubly these are bound together; but he knows also that in the history of the Christian Church now one and now another has held the dominant place. Such shifting from age to age of the center of gravity of religion, is of the deepest significance in the history of the higher life of mankind.

In the religious thought of these present times we see a turning away from the doctrinal and the ecclesiastical elements that laid a strong hold on the minds of men in other days. Within the church, the interest in these things is languid as compared with that of an earlier age. And we cannot forget that a great part of the religious aspiration and emotion of our day arises outside of the church. It will not be contained in the old dogmatic and institutional forms. It has not made new forms for itself; and, in truth, it does not much care to make new forms. Yet that is not to deny to it altogether the religious character. It is an overflow religion. For the most part it may be recognized as an overflow of Christianity.

Now, if there are no institutional forms and no systematic theology that have succeeded in gathering up and unifying this overflow of religion, it does, in fact, find some internal unification,

which makes of it one tendency and not many unrelated tendencies. And that unifying principle is humanitarian and ethical.

Even in the church, and particularly in the Protestant church, it would seem that the turning away from those earlier centers of religious conviction, the system of doctrine and ecclesiastical polity, were to work out as a definite turning to a center of moral conviction. But not moral as touching mere practice according to customary standards. It is rather the moral as essential righteousness with which we were here concerned. And again, not righteousness as a term in a system of theology, but righteousness as apprehended by the large human sense which values the right above the wrong, and that overwhelmingly.

Already the signs of such new centering of religion clearly appear. For many in this present age, religion is reached by way of the moral sense, rather than morals by the way of religion. It is not that the historic authority, the miracles, the incense of religion bring men to religious convictions, which thereafter are the ground of all of their moral convictions; but it is rather that through the moral sense, through hunger after righteousness, they find a moral universe in which the all-righteous God is their Father.

It is not to be supposed that this new centering of the religious life is the ultimate term of our religious development, any more than those earlier centerings have been. It has its dangers and inadequacies as they had. Other centers, perhaps those that the past has known, but in new form and heightened power, must send forth a corrective influence in their turn when this age has past away. But this age, I think, must work out its religious advance, a great and true advance from the point at which it began, by realizing the full meaning of those moral conceptions which have taken strong hold on this age.

We have come now to a point where it will appear, that, for the sake of religion itself—in order that religion may do its proper work in this age—education must be true to its proper character for this age. The most vital meeting place for education and religion in this age is on the moral plane. Through its new emphasis on moral conceptions, education itself, secular education if you would call it such, may help religion to work its way

through and overcome its present-day sectarianism. Education will be the best ally of religion in this age if it holds true to its alliance with science and democracy.

Observe how vitally the several lines converge. Democracy stands for the brotherhood of man. Religion bases that brotherhood on what is ultimately a more cohesive and organic conception, the Fatherhood of God. In this humanitarian age, however, it seems more probable that the great majority of men will find the Father through that brotherhood rather than find brotherhood through a prior knowledge of the Father. Pure devotion to truth is found in both religion and science. Historically, the religious sense for truth appears as a very different thing from the scientific sense for truth. They seem, indeed, to antagonize and cancel each other. Yet farther down they are at one. And from that farther depth, below the roots of the everlasting hills, their unity must arise into the day of human history.

If this is a true reading of the signs, the same moral conceptions are coming to be the uppermost convictions in science, in democracy, and in religion. It may not be too much to expect that this unity shall someday come to full realization; and may we not then find that diverse religions have come to unity among themselves in this very process of coming into accord with democracy and science on the high ground of moral conviction? I am very sure that this will not be all; but I think this may be a part of the way by which religion and education shall do their work together for this age, and for the ages that are yet to be.

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